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ABSTRACT

Designed to focus on the implications of change, Macomb Community College has comprised a list of the top ten issues facing America's community colleges today. Diversity is the first issue that community colleges face. Each college should develop a unique mission statement and respond to the changing needs of the community and the marketplace. The second major issue is open access. While open access has created diversity in the classroom, it has also made the task of meeting the individual needs of each student more difficult. Quality education is another major issue. The performance of community colleges is no longer equated to expansion; in the future, community colleges will have to define and document student success. A fourth issue relates to the shortage of professionals which will occur during the 1990s. Community colleges must prepare to compete in the recruiting arena in the coming years. The issue of physical access to education has also arisen due to changing demographics and increasing technology. Colleges must cope with the new wave of "electronic commuting." Instructional currency is another issue which must be dealt with by quality staff and college administrators, who must develop a future-focused vision. Such vision requires balancing community needs against programming which accommodates new advances and discoveries. Similarly, articulation efforts must be more efficient, as seamless transitions between institutions will help educators define their purpose, encourage more effective resource deployment, and produce better students. In addition, sound mission statements must be developed in order to define institutional niches; otherwise, colleges may fall into the trap of trying to provide programs and services for every niche in the community college marketplace, an unattainable goal with limited resources. The issue of college governance must also be addressed; boards have to work at becoming more effective by defining their role and setting goals for themselves as a board. Before many of these changes can occur, however, colleges must be willing to change, to move from a foundation of success into a future of uncertainties. (JMC)

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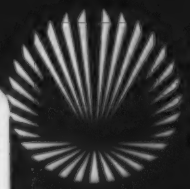
The Institute For Future Studies



Macomb Community College

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Foreword

This is the first edition of the Top Ten Issues Facing America's Community Colleges. It will be an annual publication of Macomb Community College's new Institute for Future Studies.

Designed to focus on the implications of change, the Institute will provide advance alerts to social fluctuation, encourage thinking, and generate new perspectives for the decision-making process.

Part of the Institute's mission is to help leaders anticipate trends and accommodate emerging issues. We are hopeful that this work will also restore some of the societal predictability which has been lost during the last two decades.

This initial "Top Ten" list is the result of an extensive literature review and our personal experiences. During the decade ahead we will broaden our base by conducting significant "future scans" in nine topical categories.

We believe that any forum for inquiring minds will result in new perspectives. We also believe open exchange will pave the way for creative responses to the opportunities we'll discover on our journey into the future. That's why we encourage public discussion of the material presented in this document. Its quick-hitting format is designed for rapid reading. Its content is intended to raise questions and stimulate dialog.

Just as our ancestors developed new tools for new challenges, so too are we working to develop our trend tracking and forecasting techniques for a new era. We invite you to join us in our effort to invent these new tools for a new age.

Our motives are simultaneously noble and self-serving. We are focused on strengthening the quality of our staff, our students and our thinking. We are committed to assuring that the community college mission conforms to changing social needs. And we seek the advantage an anticipatory mindset can provide our institution in an increasingly competitive environment.

Albert L. Lorenzo, President
Macomb Community College

William J. Banach, Executive Director
Institute for Future Studies

January 1, 1990

Future Scan

Future Scan is the process by which nine topical categories are systematically monitored. These broad categories of focus are defined as follows:

1. **Public opinion** — commonly held perceptions and understandings
2. **Economics** — the workplace, the workforce and the exchange of value
3. **Demographics** — vital human statistics
4. **Social values & lifestyles** — the beliefs and behaviors of people
5. **Organizational contexts** — how people organize to relate, share, achieve and compete
6. **Political climate** — the governing context in which people and organizations pursue their objectives
7. **Education** — society's efforts to produce an enlightened citizenry
8. **Advances & discoveries** — machines, processes and techniques which enhance or replace the human element
9. **World affairs** — interactions of groups and nations which affect the marketplace or political climate

The Top Ten Issues Facing America's Community Colleges

- Diverse footprints
- Hetero*genius*
- Quality indicators
- Pursuing professionals
- Access II
- Instructional currency
- Blended borders
- Knowing the niches
- Governance
- Willingness

Diverse footprints

Community colleges should look like their communities. They were designed to be reflections of one another.

This results — as it should — in a unique personality or footprint for every college. Each must identify and explain *its* mission to *its* community. At best this leads — as it should — to 1,200 two-year colleges communicating 1,200 mission statements.

And, since communities are destined to become more diverse, community colleges are destined to become even more dissimilar. This, too, is as it should be.

Implications

Diversity can only be a strength when it is channeled in the direction of the core beliefs underlying the community college concept. Capitalizing on it dictates making "coordinated individuality" a priority goal for community colleges during the decade ahead.

Diversity can only be a strength when it is channeled in the direction of the core beliefs underlying the community college concept.

Three optimum conditions are necessary for a community college to maintain it's uniqueness *and* address the future responsively:

1. All community colleges must be committed to responding to the needs of their marketplace. This means getting a realistic fix on marketplace needs and matching programming against them.

2. All community colleges must identify their mission, and the mission must reflect the social purposes for which community colleges were created.

3. All community colleges must successfully communicate their unique missions to their communities and to one another. This is the interchange that allows each community college to simultaneously maintain responsiveness and strengthen the community college concept.

Harmony between marketplace and mission must be a goal common to all community colleges. It is, in fact, a target which should be pursued individually *and* cooperatively.

"Coordinated individuality" can create a community college system which has a collegial approach to developing the best mirror image of the marketplace. It will produce national synergy and local effectiveness. It is, indeed, a new state of mind which will enable community colleges to leave diverse footprints on the path to excellence.

Hetero*genius*

Growing numbers of academically underprepared students are entering community college. This is not a negative reflection on high schools. Rather, it is the result of a success story.

Open access has worked! More people than ever before are going to college. They are young, old and in between. They are the most heterogeneous student body in the world.

But, as increasing numbers of Americans pursue higher education, community colleges must again face a historic policy question: Should access be granted to all who seek it?

Implications

A significant number of today's community college students did not have "college prep" programs in high school. (Those that did do quite well!) Many other students are older adults for whom college is a new experience. Then there are those adults with rusty learning skills. And, others are youngsters who wouldn't have been considered "college material" just a few years ago.

Open access has created diversity in the classroom. Faculty often face large disparities in ability, age and aspiration. Hence, meeting the individual needs of each student becomes a significant challenge.

The role of faculty must change from gatekeeper to guardian. Their job is not to weed out students, but to help them succeed.

Resource allocation is another implication of the issue. To what extent should community colleges be in the business of remediation? What are the objectives of remedial programs, and what level of resource should be dedicated to them? What is the skill level at which instruction should begin? Are taxpayers paying twice for one level of attainment as they finance remediation *and* traditional coursework?

Workplace demands and the need for an enlightened citizenry beg community colleges to help these students stay the course. The role of faculty must change from gatekeeper to guardian. Their job is not to weed out students, but to help them succeed.

In the past, those dismissed by the educational system were accommodated by the industrial workplace. But that has changed. Today there is no meaningful place for those without a sound education.

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There are also fewer people of traditional workforce age. Demographics now dictate that human capital can no longer be treated as expendable.

Serving learners of all ages, abilities and aspirations has become a difficult assignment. Now faculty must attend to nurturing the fragile factors which make the difference between giving up and getting through. The quality of life in America is directly dependent on our ability to address the task.

Quality indicators

Growth equates to success in the American culture. Big is better.

But the automatic, demography-driven growth period for most community colleges is over. No longer will the performance of community colleges be equated to the quantity of construction equipment on campus.

Across America, education is on the agenda. People are weighing resources allocated against results attained. Community colleges will not be exempt from such scrutiny.

Implications

Smart business people know the quality of their workforce will determine their competitive advantage in the economy ahead. They will lead the charge toward accountability and payoff because their bottom line has no place for mediocrity. And, the quality initiatives they demand will be reinforced and supported by students, parents and advocate groups.

Smart business people know the quality of their workforce will determine their competitive advantage in the economy ahead.

Community colleges will have to define *and* document student success. Most institutions are not prepared to accommodate either task.

Inability to measure effectiveness against meaningful standards will create negative perceptions. Negative perceptions, in turn, will lead to diminished reputation...which, in turn, will lead to legislative turbulence and diminished financial support...which, in turn, will lead to diminished quality...and so the cycle continues.

Community colleges can get ahead of the issue by turning motion into results...by doing *some*thing.

There are generic models and instrumentation to measure instructional quality and student success. They can serve as a launch point for development of materials which are meaningful in the local marketplace.

The quest to measure quality also presents opportunities for community colleges to forge long-term learning partnerships within the public and private sectors. Such partnerships will enable clients and community colleges to define and align standards and capabilities. In an ongoing relationship, the payoff can be better understanding, marketplace responsiveness, and a new reality base for indicators of quality.

Pursuing professionals

Fifty to sixty percent of community college employees will "turn over" during the 1990s. As they leave to pursue new opportunities or retirement, demographics and the job market crunch will converge to create a shortage of professionals.

The resulting vacancies will be difficult to fill for two reasons: 1. There just aren't enough people to go around; and, 2. There will be competition for top candidates.

Implications

Estimates are that community colleges will need 150,000 new faculty during the 1990s. There will be proportional shortages in all of education, and in selected private sector specialties.

Quite simply, community colleges with quality reputations will be recruiting winners.

The problem will be especially acute for community colleges because there is no career track leading to community college employment. People "show up" on the way to or from other professional pursuits. This fact may force community colleges to look at a variety of personnel options, including:

- establishing lower credential levels
- using paraprofessionals to work under the direction of master teachers
- "packaging the professor" via the new technology and marketing the expertise across political boundaries (Take a look at your copyright and royalty policies!)

Successful recruiting may depend first on the residential desirability of the community college service area. When people have multiple job options, lifestyle considerations rise higher on the agenda. This gives those treated well by geography one leg up in the staffing skirmish.

But there's a second ace in the recruiting game. It's related to vision, mission, planning, and resources. It's reputation.

Quite simply, community colleges with quality reputations will be recruiting winners.

There are usually one or two responses to the question, "Where do you work?" The first is : "Nice area" or "Beautiful country." The second is: "They're doing some great things there. They have some really good people."

Success in pursuing the professional will require favorable geography, creativity in the personnel office (which will require a marriage of personnel and public relations), and positive perceptions. Those not blessed by Mother Nature will have to give priority attention to personnel and perception.

Access II

Whether it's the reality of gridlock, changing job responsibilities, family obligations or the very nature of the convenience-oriented society, tomorrow's college consumer will seek a better delivery system.

Providing access to higher education was a fundamental, founding principle of the community college. It required knocking down the traditional barriers of academic attainment, economic capability and geographic reach.

But in round two there are new roadblocks to betterment. They include time, workplace changes, balancing family and career, and a new "edu-info bureaucracy."

Implications

Twenty-two percent of America's workers will work at home in the year 2000. Students have access to the same resources that make this "electronic commuting" possible. This new means of access will force community colleges to develop new and creative ways of bringing education *to* the student.

It's highly probable that technology...will redefine our concept of school before the next century.

Why drive 20 miles to a lecture? Check out the tape. Why experience gridlock to see a demonstration? Watch the video. Why meet a study group at a location inconvenient to everyone? Network by computer.

Interactive technology will enable students to ignore classroom boundaries. In fact, it's highly probable that technology driven by the need for convenience will redefine our concept of school before the next century.

During this decade our teaching methodology will have to become multimedia, adaptable to the new technologies, and packaged to sell. Commercially available instructional packages already have these characteristics. They look good and they work! Hence, two factors will drive educators to adjust methodology: student demand for new approaches and competition.

To make appropriate changes, faculty will need information support systems which enable them to accommodate each student's unique learning style and need.

Rules and regulations will have to be reviewed to determine whether the system is making students study things they already learned to do elsewhere.

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Attention will have to be focused on a new bottom line as what is learned becomes more important than what credentials are earned.

And, resources now committed to physical plant may have to be diverted to electronic commuting.

Other barriers to access will require partnerships. Employers will have to flex schedules so their workers can receive training and pursue additional schooling. And other agencies will have to work with community colleges to accommodate dependent care and other demands of the new American family.

Access has redefined itself at the beginning of the decade. New barriers are emerging as the community college consumer changes. But so are the horizons.

Instructional currency

There is a new canyon in America. It runs between society's new jobs and society's new workforce.

The geometric change that produced it has dramatically altered the workplace and created new, unwritten standards for education.

Ask almost any business person how their company has changed in the last five years. All will talk about dramatic differences. Most will talk about new ways of doing things. And some will say what they do and how they do it wasn't done by anyone five years ago!

The educational system cannot say the same thing. In too many cases we are trying to solve new problems with old solutions.

Implications

As the full impact of the information society strikes people in the workplace, community colleges will be forced to the leading edge. They will be at the forefront of preparing people to lead functional lives. They will help them survive in the new workplace.

The speed of change will bring a new dimension to the business of education: community colleges will have to help people get smarter quicker. Unless they can adjust rapidly to fill the gulf between workplace and workforce, the classroom of the year 2000 may be corporate!

To help students get smarter quicker, we will have to get better faster.

Quality staff will be the key to instructional currency. It's been said that educators are only as good as what's between their ears. Now the yardstick will be how quickly we deliver what we know. Individually and in small teams, staff must bring up-to-date knowledge to the right students at the right time.

College administrators, in turn, will have to specialize in understanding the marketplace, and bring timely environmental intelligence and perspective to staff.

Both staff and administration must develop a future-focused vision. Simultaneously they will have to balance community needs against programming which accommodates new advances and discoveries.

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Together they will have to build "centers of excellence" to make the best use of resources while capitalizing on the strengths of selected institutions. As educators identify and develop these pockets of specialization and quality, look for new, longer-term business and community partnerships.

The process for building and delivering instructional currency must emulate the speed of the world around us. To help students get smarter quicker, we will have to get better faster. The world will not sit around waiting for us to get excellent.

Blended borders

Producing quality students during the next decade will require intense articulation efforts...from K-12 to the community college to the four-year university. What goes before will become critically important to what comes after.

This means educational institutions will have to work together much more effectively. To do otherwise will mean losing students in the cracks between the institutions. It also will stifle the synergistic effects which have potential for producing quantum improvements in the delivery of educational services.

Implications

The cooperative environment which results from articulation and collaboration makes good sense regardless of perspective.

First, working together increases everyone's knowledge base. It is a most pleasant way to get better. Second, it helps develop respect and trust for the work of others. That's learned adult behavior...and great modeling.

Creating seamless transitions between institutions will not be easy.

But the reality is that community colleges have a pretty weak grip on what is happening in K-12...and vice-versa. Compounding matters, university folks are often more concerned with academic aura than student attainment.

Creating seamless transitions between institutions will not be easy. It will require the development, coordination and communication of multilevel mission statements. Very clearly, it will be necessary to define who does what for which purpose when. And then there will be a need to determine, spell out and commit to areas of individual responsibility and mutual accountability.

It seems the most logical response to the challenge of creating blended borders is what we would do if we were designing an educational system from scratch. We would talk about outcomes in student terms. We would decide where each student should be exposed to what. We would develop the very best course content and deliver it in the proper sequence. And, we would assess how to help each student pass through the process of learning in such a manner that the resources of education were used in the most effective way.

Articulation which leads to collaboration is the highest form of success on this issue. It will help all educators define their purpose. It will encourage more effective resource deployment. And it will produce better students.

Knowing the niches

Community colleges are being asked to do more things for more people. Students want them to do this. Business wants them to do that. And special interest groups demand yet another program. Everyone has an agenda.

These demands and the turbulence of societal change provide multiple opportunities for enhancing the viability of community colleges...if they seize the moment.

Community colleges are being asked to do more things for more people.

But the question is: How small can a critical mass be? There are not — and will never be — enough resources to provide programs and services for every niche in the community college marketplace.

Implications

Most community colleges have not organized to address change and create preferred futures. Many have not organized to gather the environmental intelligence needed to provide strategic advantage in the next decade.

There are two consequences: the organization is not sure which niche to be in or sees *every* niche as an opportunity.

Those who are unsure tend toward status quo programming. They adopt a "Don't fix it until it breaks-" mentality. They tend to inhibit student success in a changing social and economic context.

Those who see every niche as an opportunity create "niche-driven" organizations which cannot effectively plan for the future. Their course is set by too many hands, and their enterprise is buffeted about by the most subtle breezes.

Whether a niche deserves response is a question related to vision and mission...and policy. For example, where both are not possible, should the college be driven by the client's educational need or fiscal viability? Do colleges assign higher priority and allocate more resources to business related niches than to those advocated by community organizations...or left of center special interest groups...or students?

A sound mission statement can provide solution to the issue and create strategic advantage. It can define institutional niches. And it can help community colleges know when to get in, when to get out and when to cut their losses.

Of course, the dilemma is: Do we lead people in the direction of our mission or do we rewrite it?

The people who make up community college governing boards are engaged in some of society's most important work. They are dedicated citizens who labor for societal good in the heat of the public spotlight.

Let there be no doubt that serving as a trustee is tough duty.

Their learning environment is one no teacher would design, and the lesson plan for their training would raise red flags in the personnel office.

Let there be no doubt that serving as a trustee is tough duty. Yet most people come to the job without experience. Most have not had to deal with multimillion dollar budgets and heavy duty policy issues. And most have not had exposure to the entire scope of the educational enterprise. They don't receive much help when they arrive.

Implications

When vision is limited or out of focus, organizational mission tends to have a political foundation instead of a reality base. That makes the college susceptible to lurches in the direction of the latest fad or the loudest special interest group.

One result is that administrative time becomes consumed by political urgencies. Next, staff becomes disoriented and programs diversify without direction. Ultimately, instructional quality deteriorates, and student success becomes an unreachable objective.

Like any winning team, boards have to work at becoming more effective. They can start by defining their role. Then they can set goals for themselves *as a board*. And, then trustees can look to the administration for help in four areas:

1. Developing an orientation program which helps trustees develop a big picture view of the organization. Community colleges are usually more comprehensive than new trustees expect, and the interrelationships between various components of the organization are both complex and dynamic.

2. Gaining an accurate picture of the "customer base." Trustees need to understand the entire community college service area, from at least a demographic point of view.

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3. Designing a process for evaluating the performance of the organization and its executive level staff. This is a key role of the trustees because an evaluation process which everybody understands helps the organization become even more effective.

4. Proposing and facilitating a continuing board development program.

Championship teams understand the dimensions of the game. They work to become the best they can be, they continually strive for competitive advantage, and they constantly evaluate their progress. Those characteristics are also common to championship quality governance.

Willingness

Community colleges pride themselves on openness to change and quick response to environmental conditions...but the reality differs from the self-perceptions.

Too often community colleges aren't willing to change. They have not nurtured a culture which encourages risk-taking and innovation. Other times, they wait too long before they break into the open...or they fake running toward the future while both feet are trapped in tradition.

Implications

As the push to become future-oriented grows stronger...as the need for creative response becomes more evident...as geometric change becomes the norm, watch for a restructuring in the delivery of post-secondary education. The changes will be driven first by politics, then by economics.

The future is a journey, not a destination.

States now characterized as autonomous will move toward the center of the continuum as resources tighten. It's paradoxical that they will become more open by closing.

These states will re-evaluate whether every community college can be everything to every community — whether each community *should* attempt full-spectrum education. (This is the closing.) There will also be attempts to assure that the future is being addressed in some systematic fashion. (This is the opening.)

States with tighter, centralized reins on community colleges will also move toward the center of the continuum. They will provide more freedom in the belief that looser controls will lead to more innovation and creative solutions to opportunities in the community college environment.

These structural changes will grant community colleges the "permission" to change.

Willingness to change, however, will be the bigger challenge. Community colleges will have to move from a foundation of success into a future of uncertainties.

They will have to address an environment in flux. They will have to take risks and learn to tolerate intelligent failure. They will have to move *before* society stabilizes and the outcomes of change are known.

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For many, this will require internal restructuring. For others, it will mean a new era in staff relationships, and the beginning of vision-driven empowerment. It will require communication candor, and an organizational culture characterized by openness, fairness and trust.

The future is a journey, not a destination. It is something we are all headed toward, but none of us will ever see. It is an endless venture requiring continuing alertness to an ever-changing landscape. Only those who are willing can make the trip.

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